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**Testimony of Darryl Newman, Legislative Co-Chair, CNLA**

**Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association**

**February 17, 2017**

**RE: H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Good afternoon Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Darryl Newman, and I am the Legislative Co-Chair of the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association.

We would like to first commend the Appropriations Committee for their difficult work in making a tight budget work for the myriad of interests that the state of Connecticut has to address.

As a group that advocates for the betterment of Horticulture in Connecticut, we rely on the state to provide certain vital services. One such service is the presence of nursery inspectors for inspecting all nursery stock to be exported out of Connecticut. Given the large volume of both nursery and greenhouse material that is produced, it is imperative that there be enough inspectors, and for that reason strongly encourage the committee maintain the proposed addition of an inspector for fiscal year 18-19.

The Community Investment Act is a critical program that needs to be appropriately funded to ensure long term viability of farms. We appreciate the funding not being further cut from FY 2017, but strongly encourage the committee to reconsider fully funding that act via real estate transaction fees as originally intended. Ag viability and farm transition grants in particular are of vital importance to the Nursery/Greenhouse industry, and the Connecticut Grown program is beginning to develop some solid recognition in the marketplace.

In order to keep multiple generations of families farming, we also suggest that Connecticut estate tax be raised to the federal level of \$5 million. Given the high cost of land in the state, it is often prohibitively expensive to purchase farmland. Raising the estate tax would allow farmers to keep their land in agriculture and help deflect some of the development pressure of their high value lands when being passed from one generation to another.

Agriscience schools are often the best means of preparing future horticultural professionals. We strongly recommend minimizing cuts to these programs that already receive less funding per student than traditional schooling and provide a stream of students that are either ready to work or well directed in pursuit of higher education in a science based industry that is short on qualified professionals.

We again commend this committee and the entire body of Connecticut lawmakers for dealing with an incredibly difficult budget while trying to offer as much possible value to a diverse constituency. I am always available for questions or comments should any of you see fit.

Best Regards,

Darryl Newman  
Legislative Co-Chair  
Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association